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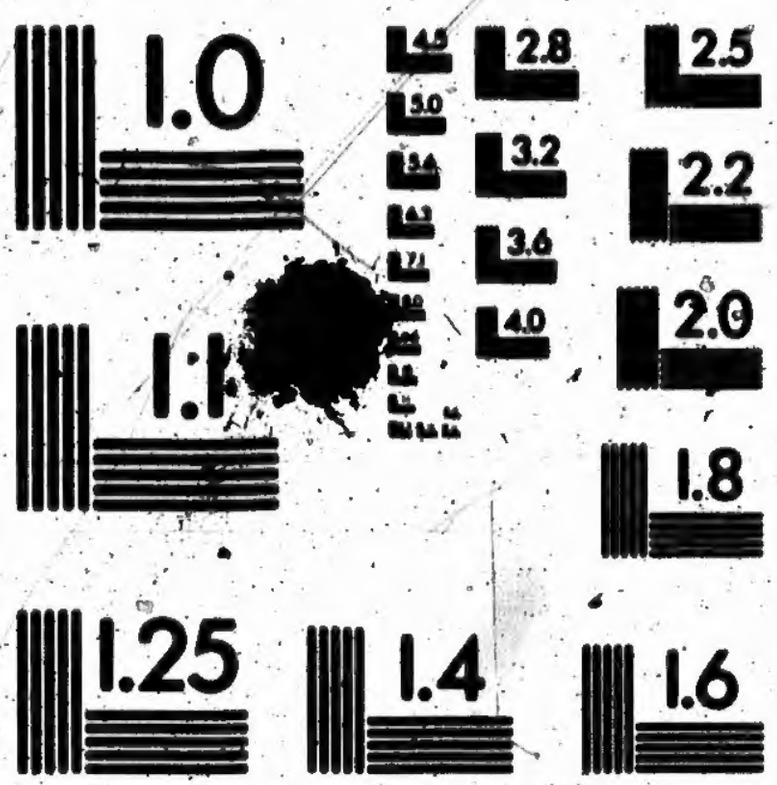

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SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY,

AT

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH,

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, APRIL 24, 1892.

BY

REV. N. LEMOINE,

RECTOR OF THE PARISH OF ST. MARK AND ST. JOHN.

HALIFAX, N. S.:
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1892.

SERMON.

PHIL. III. 20 AND 21.

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

I know not that in the whole range of the New Testament I could have selected a text more suitable to the present occasion, for you are gathered together here this afternoon as Englishmen, or the descendants of Englishmen, in the spirit of patriotism, to celebrate the anniversary of the Patron Saint of England. And you are to remember also, because you are Churchmen, that the fact which the Church brings before us at this Eastertide is the great fact of the Resurrection. And here, my brothers, in the text that I have just read to you, we have these two ideas combined. We have the idea of patriotism as brought under our notice in the word "conversation," or as it is correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "citizenship" or "commonwealth;" and we have the fact of our resurrection to eternal life which follows upon a true devotion to the heavenly country by virtue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body."

"Our Citizenship." Let me ask you to consider for a moment the power of this expression, as used by the Apostle. It was a word that implied all the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen; it was a word of which the *Apostle himself* was justly proud. He was proud of the city and the nation to which he belonged. We hear him saying, in tones that cannot be mistaken, "*I am a citizen of no* MEAN *city.*" We hear him later on laying claim to his own nationality, and asking in the fervent spirit of patriotism "Are they Hebrews? So am I." "Are they of the seed of Abraham? So am I." There was no foreign admixture in *his* blood. The blood that ran in *his* veins had been

handed down unsullied from the illustrious patriarch Abraham. "I am (he says) a Hebrew of the Hebrews." No concession to foreign excitements, no relaxation of national rights, no yielding to foreign influences, shall ever compromise my position. "I am a PHARISEE of the *Pharisees*." And then, as a member of that great empire which stretched out her hand into every clime, and carried her citizens into all quarters of the globe, the Apostle was proud of his position. When he is, being released from the dungeon at Philippi, and again when he is about to be scourged in Jerusalem, he claims the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen. We hear him saying, in language which tells its own tale: "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily; nay verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out." "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?" Yes, my friends, the *Apostle* was proud of the term "citizenship;" and so also were *the men to whom the Apostle was writing*. They were inhabitants of a Roman colony. Philippi, the town in which they lived, was one of the garrisons of the Roman Empire: It was to Rome what Halifax is to England. It was populated with some of the bravest of Roman soldiers—men who had been sent out from their own country to fight her battles against insurgents. These Philippines were proud of their nationality. They knew that, though they were far removed from the land of their birth, yet they were still united by the bond of "citizenship." They gloried in that magnificent privilege. They knew that, however far from home a man might be situated, however separated from family relationships, however removed from friends near and dear to him, he could still claim the immunity, the protection, the deference, the assistance, the brotherly kindness, which was everywhere accorded a Roman citizen, and that in time of danger, or in the hour of distress or fear, he had at his back all the power, and all the prestige, and all the majesty, of the mightiest empire the world had ever seen.

Such, dear brothers, was the privilege of being a *Roman*. And what is it, think you, to be an *Englishman?* If it was a great thing to be a Roman citizen, is it not a greater thing to be an Englishman? If Paul had good reason to be proud of his nationality, and if the Philippines could rejoice at the thought of their citizenship, surely you and I have greater reason to be proud of ours. For where is there a nation in the history of the human race that has done

so much for the amelioration of mankind as the nation to which it is our privilege and our pride to belong? She has placed herself in the forefront of all truly moral and religious reforms. With that love of liberty which is dear to the heart of every Englishman, she has been the first and the mightiest in severing the fetters of the slave. She has been the pioneer of missionary enterprise, and through her efforts the Gospel is to-day preached in foreign lands in twenty times as many languages as were spoken on the Day of Pentecost. She has handed down by the unbroken continuity of her Church the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints. No nation has upheld so chivalrously the honor and the dignity of womanhood; while that most beautiful and powerful institution, the "English home," is without a parallel in the annals of the human race. The history of your country is the record of noble deeds and lofty enthusiasms, which I have not time to-day to dwell upon. I do not say that it is without spot; we know that there is much in the annals of England which might well cause us to blush with shame. But it is a history of which Englishmen might rightly be proud; and we cannot but feel, as we cherish to-day the recollections of the glorious scenes in our history, that they are part and parcel of ourselves; that we are members of one family; that our long roll of illustrious men, our statesmen, our generals, our men of science, and our self-sacrificing missionaries, are our fellow citizens; that their renown is our renown, their success is our success. We feel that we are "citizens of no mean city"—that, in one word, it is *something* to be an *Englishman*.

And then this power of patriotism is strengthened when we consider the *growth* and *extent* of our empire.

One of the greatest of English mathematicians lately stated that taking into account not mere extent, but all other necessary elements for enlargement, the British Empire is now five times as great as it was 50 years ago. England's Queen to-day rules over one-fifth of the whole human race, and exerts a mighty influence which is felt by every nation in the old world and the new. British manufactures lead the van in every country, and British vessels alone absorb more than three-fourths of the carrying traffic of the globe. Never certainly since the world began did any nation assume so great responsibility. It is not outstepping the limits of truth to say that to the English nation God has undoubtedly assigned the future history of the whole world.

And then think for a moment of the *enormous* wealth of England.

I quote the words of Mr. Gladstone, than whom you can have no higher financial authority, that the present income of Great Britain is more than one thousand million pounds a year, and that more money has been made in England and Scotland in the last half century alone than during all the centuries from the days of Julius Cæsar to the year 1800. She stands to-day as the largest and the wealthiest nation the world has seen. Her soldiers are to be met with in every clime, her ships are to be seen in all waters, and go where you will you will always find the brotherly hand, and shall I not also add the sympathetic heart, of an Englishman.

But let us not think for a moment that our country is free from danger, and that you and I have not our part to play in the future history of the nation. There are before the statesmen of England many serious and perplexing problems, and to which the thoughts of Englishmen are now being turned. We rejoice in the fact that England is a *wealthy* nation. But the existence of fabulous wealth is by no means a sure sign of prosperity. If wealth is a gorged monster in the midst of starving populations, as was the case just before the fall of ancient Rome, and it is to be feared that such is the case in England to-day; if wealth, I say, is a gorged monster in the midst of overcrowded and starving populations, then wealth is no more a sign of a nation's prosperity than the hectic flush on the cheek of a man dying of consumption is the sign of *health*. No one who reads the signs of the times can be ignorant of the fact, that whole classes of Englishmen are at this moment engaged in a struggle to hold back by the ears the wolf of poverty. "There are in London alone no less than eight hundred thousand paupers, and fully half a million of these are in a state of abject destitution, and are helped by charity. The towns in the motherland are becoming overpopulated, so that if things go on unchecked, before two centuries are over, England will be one huge intolerable town, a furious centre of prolific vitality, the grave alike of the physique and morality of our race." Hence it is that you notice every week the large numbers of our fellow countrymen who leave the motherland and migrate to these shores. And you, to whom it is my privilege to speak this afternoon, are united together in the bonds of brotherhood to hold out a welcoming hand, and to relieve and assist any of your fellows who may happen to be in need. My brothers, suffer me to say that I trust such assistance is willingly and cheerfully given, and that with no niggardly

hand. Yours is a noble, a Christ like work. To bear one another's burdens is to fulfil the law of Christ. To minister to the sick and the distressed; to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked; to make life a little happier and a little brighter and better for our fellow man: this is pure and undefiled religion, and this is the work that shall reap its due reward.

But as members of your St. George's Society, as children of the Catholic Church of Christ, as Englishmen, as men, you have a work to do not only to the *bodies* of your fellowmen; you have a work to do for their *souls*. And remember it, I charge you in God's house to-day, that man is the better patriot, that man is the better philanthropist, who wipes out the *causes* of distress than he who deals only with its *effects*. It is a blessed thing to *relieve* your countrymen, a blessed thing to administer to their wants, and to help them with your money; but it is a far more blessed thing to help them by your influence and example to walk in the paths of holiness, and to keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right. And if the existence of abnormal wealth side by side with abnormal poverty be one of the dangers that threaten our nation, sure I am that there are others far greater and far more impending. There is that triple-headed monster of infidelity, impurity, and drink. There is that open unbelief which abjures altogether the name of Christ, and denies the existence of the Supreme Being, and treats with ridicule the idea of a life which is to come. We feel its breath in scientific treatises; we feel it in daily periodicals, in casual conversations, and in earnest arguments. We hear it openly professed in the street and on the platform, and to-day it is counted the correct thing, in fact a mark of superiority, among our young men, to be an agnostic or a freethinker. There is that unblushing immorality which is brought to light from time to time by the divorce courts, and which exists in all classes of society. In the upper classes there is too much of lax morals, gilded frivolity, voluptuous self-indulgence, callous selfishness; and at the other extreme there are dens where men brutally kick their wives, and women starve and strangle their babes; and both of these alike never use the name of God but to give emphasis to a curse or to gain credence for a lie. And then look at the curse of drink, which is ruining homes and blighting lives, and working the wreck of body and soul, and making men and women false to their manhood and womanhood; the curse of drink, which, be it said to our shame, has stained the name of Englishman wherever

it is known, and has been the bane and leprosy of our civilization in all quarters of the globe. Is it nothing to be told that the working classes of England spend annually one hundred and eighty million dollars in this soul-destroying poison, a sum sufficient to redeem the whole kingdom from pauperism? Is it nothing to see the young man reeling through our streets, and, as I witnessed only last evening, the young woman lying in the gutter in a bestial state of intoxication? Nay, my brothers, I recall that word "bestial," for it were a libel on the lower creatures. A beast knows when he has had enough, and you cannot compel him to drink any more, but some of us men never know when we have had sufficient.

These—infidelity, impurity, and drink—these are the dangers which threaten the nation, and, believe me, they are no unreal dangers. "You trust," said Oliver Cromwell, "to the ditch that guards your coasts. But I tell you that if you break God's commandments, it is not your ditch that will save you." We might in like manner trust to our riches, our ironclads, our soldiers; but depend upon it, neither our gold, nor our ships, nor our armies, nor anything else, will save us if we ignore God and violate His laws. A nation morally corrupt is a nation physically weak. When, for instance, was England at the nadir of her degradation? Was it not when her morality was at the lowest ebb? Was it not at the time of the Stuart restoration, when harlots toyed with her crown in the gilded chambers of Whitehall, and her debased king was the perjured pensioner of France? And if—but may God avert the omen—if again England should ever forget herself and turn her back upon her God, if infidelity or lust or drunkenness should lead her captive, her collapse will be just as sudden and just as certain as was the fall of Babylon, or Assyria, or Rome.

My brothers, you may say to me, "it is *very little* that we can do to avert this calamity." I tell you, you can *do a* GREAT DEAL. There is not a soul in this Church this afternoon that can evade the responsibilities which God has laid upon him. You can add to or diminish the evil around you. You can, by your deeds, by your words, and by your example among your fellow men, exert an influence either for good or for evil upon generations that are yet unborn. And believe me, every one of you who is a better, or a gambler, or a drunkard, or a corrupter of others, is hastening the *ruin of England* just as surely as he is consummating the destruction of his own soul. While, on the other hand, he who does his duty from day to day, as under the

all-seeing eye of God; he who by a pure and manly life does all that is in his power for the welfare of his fellow man; he who does justly, and loves mercy and, walks humbly with his God, *that man*, as he is a Christian, so he is the best of patriots, and is the best supporter and defender of his native land.

My brothers, suffer me one word in closing. You have come here to-day, in the spirit of patriotism, to show your love for your country, and, I trust, also your love for your God. You rejoice in the fact that you are citizens of a great kingdom, unique in her great world empire, unique in the fact that the sun never sets on her dominions. Oh, remember it! I charge you in God's House to-day, that you are citizens of a greater empire than that of England. "Our conversation, our citizenship, is in Heaven"; and what patriotism is to the humblest Englishman, so to the humblest Christian should be the thought that our true citizenship is above. You are something higher than Englishmen, something nobler than members of the St. George's Society—you are members of the Catholic Church of Christ. You are pledged by the vows of your Baptism to fight manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil. You are bound together with common duties, common interests, and common aims; you are citizens of a kingdom of which the noblest and most powerful empires are but faint types and feeble shadows.

Keep this fact, I beg of you, always before you, wherever you go, or whatever you do. Keep your bodies in temperance, soberness, and chastity. Live in the power of Christ's resurrection. Live as citizens of that Holy City whose builder and maker is God. And remember, as brother Englishmen, as members of your Society, as children of the Church of Christ—

> "No distance breaks the tie of blood;
> Brothers are brothers evermore.
> Nor wrong, nor wrath of deadliest mood,
> That magic may o'erpower."